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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on research into the professional development practice of principals in the Diocese of Parramatta, which administers a system of approximately 75 schools in the west of Sydney, Australia. A survey of 46 principals gathered data on respondents' qualifications, association membership, participation in Catholic Education Office professional development activities and in inservices provided by other agencies, conferences attended, other activities contributing to professional development, valued forms of professional development, perceived professional development needs, preferred methods of delivery, and tertiary credit. The data indicated that the principals in the Parramatta diocese are, by and large, an experienced and highly qualified group and in general they participate regularly in professional development activities. The most commonly attended forms of professional development are conferences organized by the principals' associations. The most valued professional development activities are those classified as "learning on the job" or involving interpersonal skill development. Female principals, lay principals, and primary principals attended more professional development activities than their male, religious, and secondary counterparts respectively. In light of these results, three major initiatives were developed to address the professional development of principals at three stages: pre-appointment, induction, and ongoing development. (JDD)

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Empowering the Principal through Professional Development

Paper presented to the
Australian Teacher Education Association Conference
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Introduction

The Catholic Education Office, Diocese of Parramatta administers a system of approximately 75 schools in the west of Sydney. It has been at the forefront of executive development activities since shortly after its establishment, with the introduction of the innovative Executive Development Program (EDP) in collaboration with the Australian Catholic University. This program has involved joint delivery of a package of six units which contributed towards the skill and knowledge of principals and middle managers, and were part of a graduate program at the University. Over the last five years, some sixty participants have completed the program reporting a high degree of satisfaction.

However, it became apparent over time that the EDP was meeting the needs of aspirants to the principalship rather than those already in the role. The introduction of new appraisal procedures for principals and work on criteria for principal selection in 1993 sharpened the focus on the principalship, and highlighted the need to reappraise the ways in which principal professional development might best be comprehensively supported in the Diocese.

This growing awareness gave rise to a systematic review of current practice in the Parramatta system, with the purpose of making a series of recommendations about the best vehicle(s) for the delivery of principal professional development. Some of the major features of the review are reported in this paper. The purposes of the paper are to report the processes and results of the research into current professional development practice of principals in the Diocese, and to outline three of the major initiatives which have resulted from the review.

The literature on principal professional development

A brief review of the literature was the first stage of the process of reappraising current practice in principal professional development. It enabled the identification of six major features of successful principal professional development programs.

- They are built upon praxis and reflection;
- They take place largely in the context of the school;
- They require appropriate motivation;
- They will be most successful in a collaborative learning culture;

- They will require appropriate resources;
- They are not always amenable to credentialling.

The answer to effecting change and institutional improvement is more likely to be found if leadership formation programs assist leaders to examine their attitudes towards helping people, assist them to learn more effectively from their experience on the job, and assist them to critically examine the meanings they attribute to these experiences. (Keane, 1991) Professional growth is fostered in many ways, and practising principals have rich opportunities to increase their leadership effectiveness on *task* by learning more consciously and systematically from day-to-day experience. (France, 1986) Michael Fullan (1991: 338) stresses that inservice programs are of little value if they do not lead to change in the principal's work practice.

The literature suggests a broadening of the traditional inservice model by which principals are withdrawn from schools. Single-day inservice courses and short residential inservicing are still regarded as helpful, provided there is opportunity for processing and practising learned skills, and opportunities for feedback. (Brady, 1992: 85). A range of methodologies for principal professional development appears in the literature. Murphy and Hallinger (1992) advocate problem-based learning because it integrates the content of a principal's role (eg. legal issues, instructional supervision, staff development) with the management processes that lead to the development of the role (eg. communication, problem-solving, decision-making.) Other delivery models include mentoring (Daresh and Playko, 1992),contract coaching (Schon, 1983), system-wide short-term programs (McLaughlin, 1990), and principal forums (Duignan and McPherson, 1992)

McLaughlin (1990) suggests that leadership education should be planned jointly by at least five primary key stakeholders: teachers, principals, district personnel, system administrators and accrediting institutions. A significant document issued by the Commonwealth Department of Education and Training: *Leaders and their Learning: Professional Development Priorities for Principals,* (1993) identifies eleven approaches to principal professional development currently in place in Australia. The majority involved principals in their development in some way, and a great many were built on partnerships among key stakeholders: principals, employers and universities.

Methodology

In order to provide as broad a picture as possible of perceptions and practice it was decided to use a survey as a data gathering procedure. The purposes of the Principal Professional Development Survey were:

- to provide an overview of principals' current practice in professional development;
- to provide an overview of their perceived needs in professional development; and

- to determine whether factors such as gender, type of school (primary or secondary), school size or lay/religious status were significant predictors of professional development needs or practices.

The issues to be explored by the survey were identified by a task force made up of two principals, an academic with expertise in educational administration, and six central office personnel with some role in the professional development of principals, four of whom had also been principals.

After three preliminary drafts, two principals (one primary, one secondary) who had not been part of the task force, were asked to complete the survey and provide feedback as to the need for changes and the time taken.

The final version of the instrument was distributed to all Principals in the diocese, with a covering letter from the Acting Executive Director of Schools assuring them of the confidentiality of responses and signalling the importance of their responses. The population of 74 principals can be described in terms of the factors hypothesised as being significant predictors in professional development needs and practices. This is done in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Breakdown of population by factors hypothesised to be significant

		PRIMARY (n=50 [68%])	SECONDARY (n=24 [32%])
Lay (n=39 [53%])	Male	10 (14%)	8 (11%)
	Female	20 (28%)	1 (1%)
Religious (n=35 [47%])	Male	4 (5%)	10 (14%)
	Female	16 (22%)	5 (7%)

Male 43%, Female 57%

Principals were given ten days in which to respond. At the end of this time a fax was sent to all principals, thanking those who had already replied for their responses and encouraging others to return their surveys within three days.

Ultimately 46 responses were received, constituting a response rate of 62%. The factors used in Table 1 were applied to responses to determine the extent to which the responses can be considered to be representative of the population. This breakdown appears in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Breakdown of respondents by factors hypothesised to be significant

		PRIMARY (n=34 [74%])	SECONDARY (n=12 [26%])
Lay (n=26 [57%])	Male	7 (15%)	5 (11%)
	Female	14 (30%)	
Religious (n=20 [43%])	Male	3 (7%)	4 (9%)
	Female	10 (22%)	3 (7%)

Male 41%, Female 59%

A comparison of Table 1 and Table 2 reveals that the distribution of respondents by sub groups was sufficiently close to that of the total population to allow some confidence in extrapolating results to the whole population.

The average period of employment in education of respondents was 25.4 years (range 12-40), with 9.9 years in principalship (range 1-24). On average of principals were in their third appointment as a principal (range 1-6) and had an average tenure in the present school of 4.3 years (range 1-20).

Results

Qualifications and Tertiary Study

Qualifications held by respondents ranged from Teaching Certificates to Masters Degrees. 16 of the 46 respondents (35%) had been engaged in tertiary study in the period since the beginning of 1992. 28 had been engaged in some form of tertiary study in the last 5 years (61%), while only 6 (13%) had done no formal tertiary study in the last 10 years.

In terms of highest degrees held, 25 respondents held Masters degrees, 15 held Post Graduate Diplomas and six held undergraduate diplomas or degrees. The range in number of qualifications held was from 2 to 6, with a mean of 3.6.

Membership of associations

The breakdown of membership of professional associations is indicated in Table 3.

Table 3: Principal membership of associations

Association	*Number of members*
ITA	7
Australian College of Education	8
Subject Associations (All except 3 were PETA)	11
Other	11
Principals indicating no associations	12
Educational Administration Associations	19
National,State,Diocesan Principals' Associations	22

Clearly the most significant professional associations were those which related directly to the principalship or to educational administration more generally. Of the 12 principals who did not indicate that they belonged to any association, 8 were religious.

Participation in CEO professional development activities

Table 4 identifies the types of CEO inservices attended, and their relative frequency.

Table 4: Participation in CEO Professional Development

Inservice type	*Number*
OASIS	4
Conflict resolution	4
Supervision	4
Executive development	5
Pastoral skills for crisis management	6
Finance	6
Using the media	8
No CEO inservices indicated (All except 3 secondary)	8
School improvement	9
Building the leadership team	10
Subject specific (All except 1 primary)	15
Appraisal	16
Others	17
Curriculum leadership (Primary)	29

Thirty nine principals made responses with regard to the extent to which CEO inservice met their needs. Comments varied from "Excellent" and "Very good" to "Not greatly useful", with all except four indicating some degree of satisfaction. However, as will be seen later in the report conferences rather than CEO-provided professional development activities seem to be the major form of inservice to which principals devote their time, with an average of 6.1 days spent at conferences in the period under consideration (approximately 18 months). This could be translated into a figure of between 30 and 50 hours per person. By comparison, principals averaged 3.4 CEO inservices, with an average of 31 hours per person spent at these inservices.

Inservices provided by other agencies

The range of inservices attended which were not provided by the CEO was very wide. The overall pattern is reflected in Table 5.

Table 5: Participation in inservices not provided by the CEO

Inservice type	*Number*
Gifted and talented	2
Conflict resolution	2
Connolly Leadership course	3
Computers	4
RE/Spirituality	4
School development	5
Subject specific	10
General leadership	11
No specific activities identified	18
Other	19

If any pattern emerges from these figures it is to reflect a preference for activities related to aspects of leadership and administration (conflict resolution, school development, leadership) rather than specific curriculum issues.

Conferences attended

As foreshadowed earlier, conference attendance is the single most significant professional development activity for principals in the sample in terms of the time devoted to it. Given the level of membership in Principals' associations, the fact that the conferences of these associations figure strongly in principal professional development would be expected. Table 6 provides details.

Table 6: Frequency of attendance at conferences

Type of conference	*Number of times mentioned*
No conferences indicated	3
Other	18
Diocesan corporate plan	25
Principals' association (National, State or local)	39

Other activities contributing to professional development.

Principals identified a range of activities which they considered contributed to their professional development. These ranged from structured retreats to the learning which comes from experience. These are itemised in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Other activities contributing to professional development

Type of activity	*Number of times mentioned*
Other's appraisal	3
Consultation with Area Administrator	3
Other activities mentioned only once	4
Reading other than journals	4
Sharing with other principals	4
Membership of appointment panel	4
Learning from experience	4
School improvement activities	4
Own appraisal	5
School based staff development days	8
Retreats or structured spirituality activities	12
Meetings or committee membership outside the school	14

It is clear from the above that principals value highly opportunities for learning through activities outside their own school (meetings, appraisals, selection panels), and that a significant number seek out spiritual development activities for themselves.

Valued forms of professional development

Respondents identified a wide range of activities as having been the most valuable for them, with only 7 being mentioned by more than one respondent. Significantly, given the level of participation in conferences, only one respondent identified a conference as having been their most valuable professional development experience. The other responses are listed below:

Table 8: Most valued professional development

Forms of professional development	*Number of times mentioned*
Participation in appraisal	3
Retreats or other forms of spiritual development	3
Connolly program	3
Building the leadership team	3
Interaction with peers	4
Conflict resolution	4
Appraisal workshops	5

Four of these (appraisal and appraisal workshops, conflict resolution and building the leadership team) have been opportunities provided by the system.

Content of future programs

Responses to questionnaire items regarding perceived needs of respondents themselves and principals in general have been reported side by side in Table 9.

Table 9: Perceived needs for principals in general and for self

Significant issues	*Times mentioned (Principals)*	*Times mentioned (self)*	*Total*
Team roles	1	0	1
RE	1	2	3
Crisis management	2	1	3
Staff development	0	5	5
Stress management	3	2	5
Community relations	1	5	6
Time management	5	1	6
Computers and information technology	2	5	7
Pastoral care	4	3	7
Supervision	6	2	8
Spiritual development	6	2	8
Finance	7	2	9
Legal and industrial issues	6	4	10
Conflict resolution/interpersonal skills	6	6	12
General management/leadership issues	14	6	20
Curriculum issues and change	12	17	29

Issues related to change and curriculum were clearly seen as the greatest area of need, followed by the whole issue of leadership. Responses were included in this latter category where they were not specific in regard to the area of leadership in question. It might be assumed that the more specific areas identified by other respondents (conflict resolution, legal and industrial etc.) would form a part of the agenda for the general responses.

Methods of delivery of principal professional development

Principals suggested a wide range of approaches to "packaging" professional development. The strongest suggestions related to using extended withdrawal (anything from 2 days to a term) as opposed to (say) half day sessions, and to the use of weekends or vacation time.

Table 10: Suggested methods of delivery for principal professional development

Proposed method	*Number of times mentioned*
Breakfast meetings, industry placement, offer repeats at different times, a system like the EDP, a publication, use of office library, overnight stays.	1
Video	2
Overseas study	3
Work with school teams	3
Utilise peers	4
Extended withdrawal	7
Use vacation time/ weekends	8

Tertiary credit

In general response to the notion of tertiary credit for professional development was that it was a good idea in principle, but that it was not a major issue for most at present. It may be that this perception shifts as Ed.D. programs become more common among principals.

Some differences between subgroups

This section of the report goes beyond the level of description to an analysis of differences between sub-groups using the dichotomies identified early in the report, namely male/female, lay/religious and primary/secondary. As well, some correlations were calculated using school size and years as a principal.

For differences between means, a t-test was used to determine significance. In the case of Primary/Secondary differences, the small size of the secondary group makes it difficult to obtain a statistically significant result, so this should be kept in mind when considering differences. Moreover, the small overall sample size prevents an analysis which can take into account interaction between variable effects (eg, the combination of effects of being a female religious in a secondary school). Nonetheless, the results are quite informative, and the general trends can be just as useful for decision making as are single statistically significant results. Major comparisons are reported below. Statistically significant differences are in bold type.

Male/Female

Table 11: Average results for Male/Female comparison

Variables	*Male*	*Female*
Years as principal	3.6	4.8
Number of CEO inservices	2.9	3.7
Hours at CEO inservices	24.3	35.8
Number of non CEO inservices	1.3	2.4
Hours at non CEO inservices	**7.7**	**28.8**
Number of associations	2.4	1.6
Total number of inservices	6.0	7.0
Average length of inservice attended	**6.7**	**11.1**

While only two differences are statistically significant, there is an overall pattern which indicates that female principals attend more professional development activities than their male counterparts, and these tend to be longer in duration. The only aspect in which the female mean was lower than the male was the number of associations of which they were members. While this was not significant, it might reflect a tendency for men to "network" more than women.

Lay/Religious:

Table 12 Average results for Lay/Religious comparison

Variables	*Lay*	*Religious*
Years as principal	8.1	12.1
Number of CEO inservices	3.9	2.7
Hours at CEO inservices	37	23.3
Number of non CEO inservices	2.5	1.4
Hours at non CEO inservices	23.6	16.4
Number of associations	2.2	1.5
Total number of inservices	**6.3**	**4.0**
Average length of inservice attended	9.0	10.7

Once again a clear pattern emerges, in which lay principals seem to attend more inservices, spend more time at them and belong to a greater number of associations. Two thirds of those who did not indicate any association membership were religious. Religious principals tended to be more experienced than their lay counterparts.

Primary/Secondary:

Table 13: Average results for Primary/Secondary comparison

Variables	*Primary*	*Secondary*
Years as principal	10.4	8.3
Number of CEO inservices	4	1.5
Hours at CEO inservices	**37.4**	**10.9**
Number of non CEO inservices	2	1.9
Hours at non CEO inservices	**23.2**	**10.4**
Number of associations	1.8	2.2
Total number of inservices	6.0 This difference verges on significance.	3.4
Average length of inservice attended	**10.7**	**6.5**

Examining the differences between Primary and Secondary principals yielded the greatest number of significant results. The overall pattern revealed greater experience, greater participation in all kinds of inservice and a tendency to participate in longer inservices on the part of primary principals.

As well as testing for differences, correlations were calculated for key variables. Significant and meaningful correlations were discovered between **school size and the number of qualifications held**, and between the **average length of inservice attended and the number of years of experience as a principal**. The meaning of the correlations was that principals of larger schools tended to hold fewer qualifications, and that principals with more experience were more likely to attend longer inservice activities.

Discussion

The principals in the Parramatta Diocese are, by and large, an experienced and highly qualified group of educators and administrators. Their qualifications are current, and in general principals participate regularly in a variety of forms of professional development.

Some significant issues emerge from an examination of the more detailed results, however. The most commonly attended forms of professional development are conferences organised by the principals' associations (Table 6). This could well reflect the desire of principals to network in an environment in which they (or their colleagues) are in control of the agenda. It was curious, however, that these conferences did not appear in the list of "most valued professional development" (Table 8). In this list there appeared a number of activities which might be classified as "learning on the job" (participation in appraisal and interaction with peers) or interpersonal skills (appraisal workshops, conflict resolution, building the leadership team). These could indicate some scope for structured opportunities for groups to be given a framework for reflection on practice, and reflects the "best practices" indicated in the literature review..

A critical issue to date has been the "packaging" of programs. There was a degree of consensus in the responses to this survey (Table 10) that longer blocks are preferable to shorter ones. This would need to be balanced against models of good practice which indicate the benefits of opportunities for the application of skill and knowledge being dealt with in adult learning.

The differences between sub groups of principals provide substantial food for thought, with primary/secondary differences in participation in professional development being the most strongly supported by the results.

System response

In the light of these results, three major initiatives were set in place to form the basis of a developmental program for educational leadership. The program addresses the professional development of principals at three stages: pre-appointment, induction and ongoing development . The appraisal processes for assistant principals and principals are seen as central to ensuring that leaders in the system are supported and advised in making choices among the opportunities available.

The activities proposed as appropriate for each stage of the principal's career can, of course, be utilised by principals at later stages if they so wish

Pre-appointment

The Diocese will continue to offer programs which allow aspirants to the assistant principalship and principalship to meet the basic criteria for appointment to these positions. Units of the type previously available in the Executive Development Program have contributed significantly to the attainment of this purpose in the past, but have been limited in their impact because of the tightness of the EDP package - 6 units in two years to be taken as a set or not at all.

Negotiations are under way with the Australian Catholic University to offer a set of units on (say) a two year cycle as part of the system level professional development program. The units will be chosen on the basis of their ability to equip participants to meet published selection criteria for the principalship. The criteria are focussed on capacities for religious leadership, educational leadership, community leadership and administrative leadership.

These units may or may not be taken for credit and will be offered using the successful model of the EDP scheduling, with most units utilising some release, some evenings and a residential weekend. Limited use of vacation time is also being explored. The dynamic which establishes itself in these units facilitates the development of collaboration, reflection on practice and networking.

Induction

New principals may still be participating in course work as indicated above. However, it is appropriate to provide a structure which would encourage learning from experience. To this end, newly appointed principals will be required as a condition of appointment to work with one or more of the many highly experienced and qualified principals in the diocese in a peer support relationship for some time during the term of the first contract. The exact nature of this involvement will be negotiated with the Area Administrator. It could take forms such as mentoring, consultation visits by other principals, visits to other schools, participation in structured programs etc.

A volunteer group of experienced principals will be established to support beginning principals. They will provide the pool of expertise on which beginning principals could draw, could have some input into the existing orientation program, and might organise other appropriate experiences for particular new principals. They will be able to negotiate appropriate resourcing for their activities with the CEO, and will be supported by personnel from the Office as appropriate.

This proposal is seen as having the benefit of enhancing the professional development of the experienced principals involved as well as the new principals.

Ongoing Development of Experienced Principals

Experienced principals will have access to the basic courses and to opportunities to act in support of beginning principals if they wished. However, for experienced principals there will be a scheme to encourage the formation of self directed learning groups.

The members of a self directed learning group will come together with a commitment to work collaboratively on a specific professional development agenda, in ways which best address the needs of the group. .

The principles underpinning these groups are:

- The group will have a clear developmental focus;
- The activities of the group will be sustained and ongoing;
- The group's activities will be based on a plan, but should also allow for some flexibility;
- The agenda for the group will be set by its members, and dealt with in a fashion which is reflective and collaborative.

These groups will be supported by system personnel on request and by access to funds on a submission basis.

The existing Professional Experience Program (PEP) provides experienced principals with opportunities for personal and professional renewal. This will continue to operate, probably under guidelines which allow for increased flexibility, with provision for leave and financial support for approved programs.

Conclusion

It is planned to have pilots in induction and self directed learning groups operating during the next school term, and to finalise the arrangements for the collaborative pre-appointment program for an intake in 1995.

What has emerged for the Diocese of Parramatta from the process of review is an integrated program of principal professional development with clear links to processes of appointment and appraisal. It is too early to say yet how successful this program will be. What is clear though, is that the task force report stimulated considerable discussion among principals, and that the moves towards flexibility, reflection, partnership and ownership by participants were highly valued. The task before the system is to carry this initial enthusiasm into implementation in the months ahead.

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